

Animal Tracks

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

When a song becomes "struck" inside one's head, the individual has inadvertently retained information that insistently meanders through the mind. This phenomenon can be utilized as an educational tool. An intriguing song can be loaded up with lyrics that effectively impart new information to the listener. Teaming up with a zoology student, I have constructed a musical album that serves to educate both child and adult about various animal species. The song cycle boasts a wide range of musical styles and can appeal to individuals of different tastes. At its core, the album represents a healthy marriage of science and art.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank to thank Dr. Robert Willey for all of his advisory wisdom. I also wish to thank my MMP495 classmates for encouraging my craft. I give my gratitude to Jeremy Nevil and Aaron Sparling for lending their lungs. A final thank you belongs to David Pankow for agreeing to collaborate on this wild idea of a thesis.

Process Analysis

I have produced a collection of creative compositions. Partnering with a non-musician, I combined my musical skills with the knowledge of a zoology-major to fashion a set of somewhat silly yet smart songs about various animal species. I used my skills as a composer, performer, producer, editor, and artistic director to produce a ten-track album of music called *Animal Tracks*.

Although my partner David Pankow and I initially intended to market our music to children as a unique educational experience, we ended up producing a sonic artwork that could be appreciated by all ages. Ultimately, I desired for the music to adhere to my personal standards of taste. Additionally, the individual songs belong to a diverse set of genres. I believe the album could appeal to a wide variety of people's musical preferences.

Since I am absorbed in my own autonomy as an artist, I wanted to choose a project that permitted me complete creative control over nearly every aspect of the production process. I am interested in exercising my skills as a composer and producer, and this project required me to work in those artistic areas in a constrained window of time. Furthermore, as someone interested in non-traditional ideas in creative work, I thought it would be appropriately challenging and rewarding to work with someone who does not come from a musical background. Ultimately, the project required me to reconsider my usual musical communications while working with a non-musician. It also enabled me to educate and involve a friend in an unfamiliar field.

The project overall encouraged me to break down boundaries. Not only did I warmly welcome an outsider to the industry, I also embraced a personal initiative to go beyond my comfort zone. For example, against significant mental resistance, I cold-called zoos in the area to

try to establish a project sponsorship/fundraiser. This action required me to consider my communication abilities; and since I intend to serve others with my skills for the rest of my life, the experience has been invaluable for my future. For this project, I also reached out to a fellow Music Media Production (MMP) student whom I have only recently met, Jeremy Nevil (aka Jay Edwards). Jeremy gleefully accepted my invitation to sing a few songs. Since working together, he has been eager to get me involved in his own projects. Healthy communication enables such mutually beneficial contacts. The weekly communication required in class also acquainted me with the work of my classmates, many of whom I did not know very well beyond surface-level associations, in spite of our four years together as MMP students. These connections may prove valuable for the future. I intend to continue to perform, produce, and mix music. Additionally, I suspect I will need to be able to communicate effectively with others who come from a variety of backgrounds. From time to time, I will likely need to reach out to people whom I do not know very well to seek assistance for various matters.

Apart from the recommendations and advice of Dr. Willey, my project advisor, the main source consulted to produce this project has been my own artistic inspiration, often spontaneous and sudden. Although this source has enabled me to complete my project without any reservations, its self-reliant nature is entirely subjective. I could no doubt learn to complete an album using someone else's method.

My method unfolded as follows: starting in week three of this semester, I set out to write, record, and produce the music for two songs each week. Given my experience in this process of making music, I knew I would be able to accomplish my goal if I could sit down without distractions for a few hours one day a week. Although I initially feared I might run out of new compositional ideas, I was able to revisit and expand upon several unused musical scraps from

my memory and demo collection. Given an imminent first deadline by Dr. Willey (for which I promised to have every song completely composed and recorded), I had to work quickly and efficiently. My fragments from the past came in handy, and in spite of how hastily I arranged everything, I am not dissatisfied with my work.

In the interest of time, I decided to record all of the various instrument parts myself so as to avoid the inevitable conflicts of schedules and rehearsals, etc. This decision gave me an opportunity to exercise my talents and also work on a few instruments with which I am not very familiar (ie, mandolin and violin). For vocals, I recruited two outside individuals to participate in the project (Jeremy Nevil and Aaron Sparling). I worked on these volunteers' schedules. I also recorded some vocals myself, in spite of the initial plan.

Each Tuesday, I met with my lyricist partner David to discuss our plan for the week and receive lyrics for any particular song. For nearly every song, I made slight adjustments and additions to the text in order to better fit the music I had made. In general (and as I expected), I served as taskmaster for this project and directed David in his duties. After my partner delivered his custom cover art for the physical album, I spent the remainder of the weeks working on promotion and distribution.

Ultimately, the most difficult aspect of this project involved my partnership. David, a persistent procrastinator, often delivered less than I did on a week to week basis. Our meetings were often too brief due to scheduling conflicts. I worked at a much faster and more frequent pace, and as a result, I ended up having more music each week than David had lyrics. Under time constraints, I had to make executive decisions involving the nature of our project (e.g., my singing some of the songs). Nevertheless, I expected such an unbalanced workload due to this

project's predominant musical basis. I happily acknowledged and accomplished the work and extra efforts set out before me.

If I do another collaborative musical album in the future, I will provide much more time for the organic composition of the songs. Although I believe I accomplished my share of the work without sacrificing any artistic integrity, I suspect David rushed through the creation of some of his stanzas due to deadlines. My edits amended some of the less thoughtful passages; but I believe more time would have enabled my partner to present his best work without my intervention. In addition, I believe I could involve more people next time in order to inject more influences and objective ideas into the project.

Through making this music, I have learned that I work extremely well under the pressure of a deadline. I can accomplish a goal I set for myself. I am confident in my creative compositions and performance and production talents. All of these results have helped me realize that I should assert myself more in the production world. I should try to reach out to others who may need help or advice or assistance in assembling the total package of an album (i.e., composition, performance, production, mixing, mastering, distribution, etc). I have much experience in this line of work, and I am very passionate about it.

Animal Tracks has helped to confirm my passions for performance and production. Through this project, I have practiced my own effective method for producing an entire album from scratch. I work with a varied skill-set that is realized through a wide range of processes and programs. The process has inspired me to want to serve others with my skills. I wish to aid in the creation of art. I am eager to plunge into all the projects awaiting my aid and artistic vision.

Sources

Biron, Dean L. "Writing and Music: Album Liner Notes." *PORTAL: Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, Jan. 2011, pp. 1-14.
<http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.bsu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=75d5403f-8dee-4586-94c7-4bcb3bdfcd9e%40pdc-v-sessmgr01>. Accessed 24 March 2018.

This article comes from the well-sourced music scholar Dean Biron writing for a journal dedicated to aspects of universal human culture, the *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*. Biron's piece involves the interaction between music and the written word within the standard "album" format of music. Biron argues that written liner-note texts, a communicator of music's mighty impact and implications, are a valuable supplement to music. Through the course of his article, he cites and analyzes several excellent examples (many created by artists I quite admire). As a professional writing minor at Ball State, I am very much interested and enthused by the creative and compelling uses of language.

I believe *Animal Tracks* to be a "multi-faceted [text] that disrupt[s] received ideas of source and genre..." (Biron 2). The sum of my project synthesizes many disparate sounds, styles, and skill-sets. Additionally, the written word is integral to my project. Although I have written much about my proceedings via Dr. Willey's required logbooks and even incorporated text into the project via the artistic design/booklet of the album, my project partner David has promised to write extensive essays about the species described in each song. These supplementary essays can encourage listeners of our music, educational in nature, to learn more. Overall, this source justifies the fact that my project, though musical, is focused on more than one understanding of the word "notes".

Livosky, Marilyn, et al. "Personality and Music Preferences in College Students and Young Children." *Psychology Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, Mar. 2012, pp. 13-25. EBSCOhost, proxy.bsu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=72321293&site=ehost-live&scope=site. Accessed 24 March 2018.

This article from *Psychology*, a noted psychological journal, assesses college students' and children's musical tastes via experiments undertaken by a group of researchers from Mercyhurst College. The work is of a scientific and sociological curiosity. The data may give an intriguing indication as to how both my peers and my initial target audience may react to the music on *Animal Tracks*.

"Making the Paper: Benjamin Van Mooy." *Nature*, vol. 458, no. 7234, 05 Mar. 2009, p. 6. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1038/7234006a. Accessed 24 March 2018.

This brief snippet of an article comes from *Nature* journal, a British scientific journal that has operated for nearly 150 years. The piece cited features a small secondary blurb at the bottom of the page for readers of *Nature* to peruse. Evidently, it is aimed at those who are weary of "writing review papers [or] polishing manuscripts" (6). The blurb describes songs that "pack a science lesson into the span of three minutes and are sung in melodious voices" (6). *Animal Tracks* does the same thing! This article implies that music can be an effective way to "explain your science" (6). It indicates that others have been effective in applying music in an educational manner.